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Communicative Education in the Context of the Dialogue of Cultures and Civilisations

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Abstract

The paper looks at some ways and possibilities, pitfalls and perspectives of developing the theory of multi-level teaching of intercultural communication through co-learn languages (mother tongue, second and foreign languages) in the school and university classrooms. The author's theoretical concepts, views and suggestions are developed in the context of competence-based socio-cultural approach to intercultural communicative education.

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1. Introduction

The discussion on the objectives and the nature of modern communicative education, as well as the ways of its modelling in different learning settings has long gone beyond psychological and educational research works, because other humanities, such as philosophy, sociology and cultural studies and language pedagogy are also trying to make a contribution to this area of investigation. However, even in Russia, this has not yet led to complete understanding of the methodological background of modern communicative education, the principles of modelling it for different teaching contexts and science-based requirements for its methodological, teaching and learning support. Moreover, quite often there are some publications in which the attention is still largely focused on simple retelling of some foreign experiences without even trying to evaluate them in terms of their appropriateness to the university

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educational environment in Russia as it was done in O. I. Matyash's and S. A. Bibi's article on communicative education in the country (Matyash & Bibi, 2003). Unfortunately, the number of works of this kind significantly prevails over those in which the methodological aspects of communicative education are taken into account and carefully treated, considering the socio-cultural context of a modern man being.

This article invites to discuss the following questions of special interest related to modern intercultural communicative education through co-learn languages in schools and universities:

- What impact does a socio-cultural context of a modern man being have on the theory and practice of formation and development of a person's communicative culture in the unity of all co-learn languages in formal education (native and non-native, including second and foreign languages)?
- How important is it to recognize the philosophical meaning of a concept «dialogue of cultures» in search of the most effective models of communicative education in schools and universities that aims at teaching Russian students to co-operate and negotiate as equals with people from other countries whose values and life styles may differ significantly from their own?
- Which of the characteristics of modern university education may be recognised as essential for developing students' communicative culture that would allow them to live, communicate and co-operate successfully in today's intercultural global village?

2. Communicative Language Education and Methodology

2.1. Intercultural dialogue

Taking into consideration the socio-cultural context of a modern man being in the today's rather controversial world, one might assume that the level of communicative culture of modern professionals should at least allow a person from both mono-cultural and intercultural environment as to:

- see and understand global aspects of today's intercultural human communication, e.g., politeness as an integral component of any successful communication in the process of either mono-cultural or intercultural interaction, and today we are witnessing the process of forming global culture on the one hand, especially in online communication, and, on the other hand, some attempt to ignore specific features of what is considered polite or impolite in different countries, cultural and linguistic communities and even social strata that may lead to communicative gaps, frustration and even cultural shock that can easily destroy any co-operation between intercultural partners;
- recognize himself or herself and his/her partners as bearers of certain cultural values, life styles and be able to negotiate very controversial issues and avoid conflicts, choosing appropriate peace-making strategies;
- develop a partnership strategy for communication, collaboration and co-operation with the view of the specific socio-cultural context of human interaction and take into account the functional factors of mono-cultural or intercultural communication (Leontiev, 1997, p. 159 – 179) tuned to cultural value-orientated portrait of intercultural communication participants with a special focus on positive outcomes of their intercultural interaction.

No wonder that the concept of “intercultural dialogue” has become a key term in language pedagogy since it was introduced in the European “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together As Equals in Dignity” (2008). In this White Paper “intercultural dialogue is understood as a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic

backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others. Intercultural dialogue contributes to political, social, cultural and economic integration and the cohesion of culturally diverse societies. It fosters equality, human dignity and a sense of common purpose. It aims at developing a deeper understanding of diverse worldviews and practices, increasing co-operation and participation (or the freedom to make choices), allowing personal growth and transformation, and promoting tolerance and respect for the other” (White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue “Living Together as Equals, 2008).

It should be noted that the concept of “intercultural dialogue” is very close in its meaning to the concept of «dialogue of cultures and civilizations» (Safonova, 1991, 1996, 2001) that appeared in the Russian language pedagogy in the early 1990s and exceeded its cope. Socially significant socio-cultural ideas in the 21st century, marked by the pan-European concept of “intercultural dialogue”, in fact, have already been discussed in Russia much earlier, in the late eighties of the previous century, in the philosophical work “The world of Communication” by M. S. Kagan (1988). In this book the author gives a detailed insight into the nature and essential characteristics of such interrelated concepts as “dialogue of cultures” and “non-dialogue of cultures”. From M. S. Kagan’s point of view, there are three types of relationships between cultures, namely: 1) the pragmatic attitude of one culture to another, resulting in a purely utilitarian attitude of one culture towards another; 2) the rejection of one culture by another as a domineering type of cultural relationship between them; 3) the relationship of interaction and mutual enrichment, in other words, both cultures treat each other as equals (Kagan, 1988, p.213 – 215). The first two types of relationships between cultures are defined as «non-dialogue of cultures», and the third – as the dialogue of cultures, which may be deliberately chosen by an individual, social group, country or a group of countries as a life philosophy or a way of life.

In Russia, M. S. Kagan’s philosophical ideas about the dialogue of cultures as a person’s philosophy and style of life have found their pedagogical realization in Bibler’s educational approach “The School of Cultures Dialogue” (Bibler, 1989) and methodological socio-cultural approach to teaching languages of international communication (Safonova, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2012) that has developed a culture-oriented language methodology and a multi-level system of intercultural bilingual education in schools and universities. This system has been supported by interdisciplinary language syllabi, course-books, teaching and learning materials, evaluation and self-assessment materials. The methodology of intercultural education has been developed with consideration of the global tendencies in modern language pedagogy (cross-cultural/intercultural communicative education through co-learn languages, multi-level standardised communicative education, web-based language-and-culture teaching and learning etc), but at the same time what hasn’t been neglected in modelling this system of intercultural communicative education was Russian cultural heritage especially in terms of its values and contributions to the world culture and the country’s national educational priorities. In other words, a well thought-of educational strategy blending global positive tendencies in language pedagogy (including ‘educational europisation’), regional and national educational priorities, values, principles and pedagogical achievements seems to be more than desirable in modelling the content of modern intercultural education through all co-learn languages and cultures and at all levels in order to help students successfully face the tough challenges of today’s controversial and multifaceted world with many cultural conflicts, misunderstandings and provocations on different continents, in different regions, national states and their language communities. But the system of intercultural communicative education under consideration and its language methodology can really work in society and benefit its members only if this kind of education is available to the representatives of all social strata, not just an elite strata group of the establishment.

It seems quite obvious that possessing only the communicative culture that allows the individual to successfully communicate only in a mono-cultural and monolingual society is far from being sufficient today in the modern world. Modern communicative culture should rather allow him or her to navigate his or her way through today’s multicultural and multilingual world on his/her own, and to try to choose the most appropriate ways of co-operation and communication with other people no matter what continent or geopolitical environment or region or country they are from or what social strata they belong to. If so, the system of intercultural communicative education

through all co-learn languages and cultures should be based on such methodological principle as the principle of extending the range of cultures involved in education and self-education (going from ethnic, superethnic, regional and continental cultures to the world culture heritage) and civilization types, without neglecting social subcultures. Thus, modelling of modern intercultural communicative education today, especially in universities, has no other choice but to focus on forming students' perceptions of the dialogue of cultures and civilisations as the only alternative way of life in today's global world and as a personal philosophy of life in the 21st century (and students should voluntarily adopt them) and to cultivate attitudes to other cultures as equals, valuable in their diversity and uniqueness. Today it is of primary importance not only for any particular country, but for all countries in the world, though only a few countries may be considered as leaders in this peacemaking pedagogy.

Moreover, communicative education with multicultural and bilingual/trilingual orientations is expected to prepare students to use a variety of forms of communicative interaction and demonstrate communicative flexibility and creativity in choosing and pursuing communicative strategies that help to find a way out of cultural misunderstandings and gaps, to be a peacemaker and not a provocateur and conflict maker. Otherwise, mankind will not be able to get out of endless cultural conflicts, constantly falling into today's media manipulation without being able to resist them.

2.2. Intercultural Communication-oriented Pedagogy

Communicative education in the context of the dialogue of cultures and civilizations (carried out in all the co-learn languages and cultures, and in the unity of its verbal and non-verbal components) involves meeting quite new challenges in modern language pedagogy. Firstly, the modern intercultural- communication-oriented pedagogy and its educational strategies under consideration are expected to considerably broaden the knowledge input in the classroom, including such key points and aspects as:

- cross-cultural and intercultural communication as a human value;
- cultural awareness as a positive characteristic and a privilege of a man living in the global village who is able to think globally, interculturally and act appropriately locally in different corners of the Earth ;
- most common socio-cultural factors influencing the individual's choice of a particular communication style with people from different cultural, linguistic and socio-economic background; the degree of impact of any person's values on his/her communicative interaction with other people and vice versa;
- modern reasons (very often history-bound) for common communication failures (up to giving up the communication) between particular cultural, linguistic and social groups of people, between the representatives of different religious and/or geo-political communities;
- negative stereotyping as a cognitive destroyer of any intercultural communication;
- what is meant by communicative attractiveness and unattractiveness of human behaviour from the point of view of particular cultural and linguistic groups of people involved in communication, common communicative successes and failures typical of human interaction in intercultural settings.

Secondly, it is equally important to provide intercultural communication training for people in the choice of the most appropriate strategies for intercultural dialogue with the representatives of particular cultural or cultural-linguistic communities (ethnic, national, religious, continental cultures, civilisational and geopolitical groups, and social subcultures, as well as hybrid Internet-cultures).

Thirdly, we must not forget that the language, verbal and non-verbal activities and communication in the narrow meaning of these words are not an end in themselves in human interaction, but they are also a means of developing cooperation and looking for possible ways of solving global problems of modern civilisation. Therefore, modern intercultural education can't but stimulate critical thinking and provide practical intercultural training by means of involving students into doing systematical thought-provoking and problem-solving tasks of different complexity levels.

A significant change in the socio-cultural context of human existence, especially due to the continuous expansion

of multicultural and multilingual Internet environment and increasing forms of communication, has required a review of the component structure of intercultural communicative competence as an aim of pedagogical modelling (especially in universities). In the context of socio-cultural approach it is believed that its structure includes linguistic competence, discursive competence, socio-cultural competence, self-education competence and ICT competence, the latter by-the-by is usually not included in its structure. Moreover, it should be noted that formation and development of intercultural communicative competence in the unity of all its components is not the final goal in interculturality-oriented communicative education at the university (and it has never been so in the framework of socio-cultural approach since 1991), but its development at a particular level of language education (starting with European Waystage level A2) is a precondition for developing students' intellectual powers, communicative culture (including linguaculture), aesthetic horizons and visions, ICT powers, political culture and some other important personal qualities.

3. Discussion

However, nowadays, though much has been done in terms of intercultural education in FL methodology, there are not enough theoretical and practical attempts to interlink the FL methodology with the mother tongue methodology and second language methodology for building up an integrated approach to gradually developing students as participants of intercultural communication no matter what language is used for this purpose. And what primarily needs to be done is constructing an illustrative scale demonstrating the general and specific descriptors of successful international and intercultural communication in terms of the components of intercultural communicative competence. The 1990s European experiences (CEFR, 2001) in creating a series of scales aiming at assessing communicative language competences in modern languages may be of great use and give a clue as to how we can create intercultural scales for identifying and assessing the level of intercultural competence acquired by students in formal education and guided self-education. In order to try to create such scales we need an international effort to conduct interlinked interdisciplinary research and projects focusing on finding appropriate methods and techniques for dynamic educational co-development of the students' communicative culture through co-learn languages for particular intercultural settings, because the methodological typology of methods, techniques and procedures for evaluating the dynamics of the individual's co-development of his or her communicative culture in terms of multi-level international and intercultural education is still to appear in language-and-culture pedagogy. In other words, there is an urgent need to develop evidence-based theory of teaching intercultural communication through all co-learn languages and cultures in school and university education. Interdisciplinary modelling of intercultural communicative education through all co-learns languages and cultures in the classroom should take into account:

- modern global trends in language pedagogy and national priorities in teaching intercultural communication through all the languages taught and learnt by university students (mother tongue, second languages, foreign languages);
- cultural and historical roots of the origin and development of appropriate methodological approaches to intercultural education in a variety of educational contexts;
- what kind of cultural studies, planned to be introduced in intercultural education, are appropriate for particular students with a certain level of language competence and with the view to their personal and professional needs;
- general and specific principles of modelling intercultural education for particular teaching and learning contexts in schools and universities;
- educational potential of translation as an important aspect of modern cross-cultural communication especially professional one;
- psychological and pedagogical approaches to the evaluation of the dynamics of students' development as partners in intercultural/cross-cultural communication in co-learn languages;
- theoretical basis for designing interdisciplinary course syllabi for teaching communication across cultures;

- the genre evaluation of teaching and learning materials in terms of their appropriateness for a particular level of intercultural communicative education;
- principles of teaching and learning languages-and –cultures in different language learning contexts at schools and universities and to students with different levels of communicative language competence;
- a range of variable intercultural education models for developing students as effective partners in intercultural settings who can use co-learn languages for their professional purposes;
- the theoretical basis and evidence-based experiences of developing assessment materials in different countries and their educational establishments.

In addition, it is necessary to synthesize national and pan-European standards for teaching intercultural communication, identify and negotiate the methodological value of various results in the given sphere re-applied to each European level of communicative proficiency. At the same time, special attention should also be paid to the possibility of building up a system of intercultural tasks and activities (including bilingual or even trilingual ones), allowing bilinguals with communication skills not lower than A2 to:

- consciously gain command of a) norms and rules (including ethics) of intercultural communication in co-learn languages (including Internet communication), preventing them from demonstration of language vulgarization, communicative aggressiveness and cultural vandalism, b) effective strategies for languages and cultures co-learning in formal education and guided self-education, including useful strategies for avoiding potential communicative and cultural conflicts in intercultural settings (which speaks for the necessity to develop pedagogy-oriented conflictology as a part of intercultural communication education);
- develop such qualities as planetary politeness and cross-cultural politeness (which allows to change the speaker's/writer's strategy of intercultural communication depending on the socio-cultural characteristics of communication's participants), sociability, social and cultural observation, socio-cultural empathy and rejection of any cultural snobbery, social responsibility, constructiveness, ability to communicative creativity (including verbal creativity);
- gradually master the most important modern socio-cultural roles such as a socio-cultural observer in native and non-native cultural environment (with the level of communicative language competence close to European A2), an interpreter of a foreign cultural environment for his compatriots (at level A2), amateur tour-guide (from level B2 and above), culture mediator (starting from level B2 and above), a translator in a professional field at C1 and a professional translator as a subject of the dialogue between cultures (C2 and above);
- be prepared psychologically to co-operate with other people whose cultural values, styles and ways of life differ greatly from theirs;
- be engaged in the intercultural communication in a multicultural Internet environment and to work on the Internet projects of different levels.

According to the leading world tendencies in university education the modern communicative training for international communication should:

- be standardized (with a focus on evidence-based systematic development of communicative skills and abilities in the context of the dialogue of cultures and civilizations);
- be multi-level and the students' choice of a particular level should be tuned to their communicative and professional needs, not only teachers';
- be bilingual / trilingual with the inclusion of multilingual elements;
- be cultural studies-oriented (on the basis of the expanding range of cultures, didactically involved in educational process);
- be ICT-oriented (allowing to adequately use new technologies for the purposes of intercultural/cross-cultural communication, but with the given degree of personal safety).

4. Conclusion

To sum it up, it is important to stress that the development of the teaching theory for intercultural communication through co-learn languages and cultures in educational environment requires:

- interdisciplinary efforts for developing the fundamentals of modelling intercultural communication in all co-learn languages and cultures in formal education and beyond;
- a special focus on developing notional-functional syllabi for teaching humanities on interdisciplinary competence-based interdisciplinary basis;
- development of innovative new genres of teaching and learning materials, academic literature in general, not only for formal intercultural education, but for intercultural/cross-cultural self-education as well, the latter has not been given careful consideration yet in European countries (including Russia), either for school or university educational purposes.

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